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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PESHAWAR 000113

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SUBJECT: EXPECTED SOUTH WAZIRISTAN OPERATION CREATES DISPLACEMENT,
CONFLICT

REF: PESHAWAR 110

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (c), (d)

11. (C) Summary: South Waziristan Agency (SWA) residents fear an imminent attack by Pakistani armed forces and have begun to flee the Mehsud areas of SWA into the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas to their north and east. The displacement is complicating the political situation in an area which is already suffering from some tension between and among local tribes, and which has been relegated to the fringes of Pakistani government attention by the ongoing operations in the Malakand division of the NWFP. As Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters reportedly move back to SWA from other areas, a rival militia to the TTP has increased its activity in and around Frontier Region Tank. While a full-scale military operation appears to be at least a couple of months away, clashes between TTP and local security forces as well as rival militias are taking place and may accelerate population outflows from South Waziristan. End summary.

IDP Outflow Significant, But Not Yet At Crisis Levels

12. (C) Over the period of the last several weeks, a steady stream of people have exited SWA, as rumors have circulated indicating that a full-scale military campaign in SWA would follow the conclusion of the Pakistani armed forces' campaign in the Malakand division. According to Consulate contacts, these departures accelerated in recent weeks following a May 17 statement by President Asif Ali Zardari that the Pakistani armed forces would target the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan Agency "soon" and a responding statement by Baitullah Mahsud's Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that the residents of the Chak Malay, Spinkay Raghzay, and Kotkay Raghzay regions of SWA (all

areas populated primarily by the TTP-dominated Mehsud tribe) should leave their homes by May 18.

13. (SBU) The ICRC's NWFP representative Benno Kocher estimated the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) from SWA at "thousands" and quoted press accounts of around 60-70,000. NWFP Chief Economist Shakil Qadir acknowledged that "several thousand" individuals had departed SWA via the North Waziristan Agency (NWA). The government, Qadir said, had not yet begun to register formally these outflows. Press reports that some NWA residents, particularly from Mir Ali, are leaving their homes as well. At present, they appear not to have significantly impacted the social services net of the areas to which they have fled; according to UNHCR representative Mohammed Adar, most who have fled are in their own "winter homes" or homes of relatives in Tank, Dera Ismail Khan, and Lakki Marwat districts. The distribution of the approximately 200,000 (since then mostly returned) IDPs created by the January-February 2008 Pakistani military campaign in SWA also included large displacements to Bannu district and North Waziristan and Orakzai Agencies, as well as among the large Mehsud diaspora in Karachi and Hyderabad.

14. (C) Pakistani press reports that local administration has been directed to set up two camps, in Tank district and inside the city of Dera Ismail Khan, to receive a predicted mass exodus of IDPs; according to the same reports, work to set up the Tank camp has begun. However, neither ICRC's Kocher nor UNHCR's Adar were aware of such activity by the provincial government. Adar noted that UNHCR had not been permitted to operate in the southern areas of NWFP; Qadir, however, told PO that the NWFP government wanted UN participation in registration and feared that the UN might decline because there would be stricter

PESHAWAR 00000113 002 OF 003

measures in checking men departing the Waziristans.

Expected Uptick in Local Conflict

15. (C) The expectations of conflict and consequent displacement have the potential to exacerbate already-existing tensions in the region near the Mehsud areas of SWA. Former North Waziristan Additional Political Agent and Bannu District Coordinating Officer Javed Marwat told post that the Gandapurs, who make up a plurality of the population of Dera Ismail Khan, have a long history of feuds with the Mehsuds. A sudden influx of Mehsuds could exacerbate those tensions. He admitted, however, that this had not created serious issues in the wake of previous campaigns in the Waziristans.

16. (S/NF) A more imminent area of conflict is the immediate eastern outskirts of the Mehsud area, where a militant faction aligned with Qari Zainuddin (a close relative and successor of the assassinated Baitullah Mehsud rival Abdullah Mehsud) has been operating for several months. Tribal Journalists Federation president Selab Mehsud told the Consulate that over the past ten weeks, Qari Zainuddin's group has begun to cooperate with Turkistan Bhattani, leader of a Bhattani tribal militia that controls access into the Mehsud area of SWA with a large presence in Frontier Region Tank. (Note: The Mehsuds and Bhattanis also have a long history of rivalry because of Bhattani control of road access into/out of Mehsud territory. In the spring of 2008, Baitullah Mehsud instigated an attack on Bhattani tribesmen that left approximately 27 Bhattanis dead. There are indications that the Pakistani military behind the

scenes is supporting Qari Zainuddin and the Bhittanis against the Mehsuds in a classic divide and rule strategy that the military has also employed vis-à-vis Mullah Nazir and Baitullah Mehsud.)

17. (C) Frontier Region Tank's Jandola city remains tense with Pakistani security forces, Qari/Bhittani militias, and TTP elements operating in the area. On May 21, a suicide attack against a Frontier Corps (FC) installation near a local market killed nine and injured dozens of others. On May 22 in what was probably retaliation, the Pakistani military shelled Baitullah Mehsud-controlled areas. (Note: Tank is the home area of Frontier Corps Commander Major General Tariq Khan.) The bodies of two men who according to Selab Mehsud were affiliated with the TTP were left in the street on May 22. On May 25, Selab Mehsud reported a firefight between TTP elements and the Qari/Bhittani militias, whom he said were supported by FC, on the Jandola-Wana road. According to local press reporting on May 27 on the confrontation that killed six militants and one soldier, FC forces had secured positions several miles east of Jandola at Chegmalai. (Note: The Jandola-Chegmalai road is one of two key routes of access to South Waziristan's capital Wana where the 9th Division is located.)

18. (C) The Pakistani press reported that on May 21, SWA Political Agent Syed Shahab Ali Shah convened a jirga of elders from Mehsud subtribes in Wana, the SWA headquarters. The ostensible purpose of the meeting was the reopening of the Wana-Tank road, which had been closed for most traffic by tensions between the TTP and the Qari/Turkestan militias. According to Selab Mehsud, the jirga consisted primarily of

PESHAWAR 00000113 003 OF 003

religious leaders affiliated with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) party and elders residing in areas under the control of Baitullah Mehsud. (Note: This tracks with reftel description of the intermediaries through which Baitullah has attempted to "reach out" to the Pakistani government.) Representatives from the jirga reportedly met with Baitullah Mehsud on May 23 to attempt to mediate between him and the government, but without conclusive result.

19. (C/NF) Selab Mehsud also reported rumors of TTP militants moving south to the Waziristans from concentrations in Mohmand and Orakzai agencies. According to Selab (and also reported by another contact reftel), a large number of militants under Baitullah Mehsud cousin and subordinate Hakimullah Mehsud, concentrated primarily in Orakzai, had moved south over the past week. A spokesman for the Pakistani armed forces explained a series of May 24 airstrikes, on a Hakimullah Mehsud madrassa and houses in Orakzai, as an attempt to kill a group of Hakimullah Mehsud-linked militants preparing to transfer to SWA. Separately, SOC-FWD Peshawar reports that FC is planning to begin ground operations in Orakzai, though Hakimullah Mehsud is not the target.

Comment

19. (C) Like the Swat operation, the South Waziristan operation will come as a surprise to virtually no one; it has been telegraphed by the Pakistani government for weeks and will not likely begin on any substantial scale for at least a couple more months. It is unclear, however, that an NWFP government distracted by a massive present IDP crisis in the north will be

able to simultaneously adequately prepare for a future IDP crisis in the south. In the meantime, anti-TTP activity in F.R. Tank and surrounding areas by the Qari Zainuddin/Turkestan Bhattani militias, empowered by the tacit and possibly active support of the Pakistani military and the impending shift of area power dynamics in their direction, can be expected to increase. TTP can be expected to respond in kind. Significant further displacement, therefore, is likely not only coming out of Mehsud areas of SWA, but also from bordering areas such as F.R. Tank. End comment.

TRACY